

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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Property Address:	<b>2009 Columbia Road, NW</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Kalorama Triangle Historic District</b>	<b>X</b> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>November 29, 2012</b>	<b>X</b> Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>13-029</b>	<b>X</b> Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Anne Brockett</b>	New Construction

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Recap LLC, working with architect Michael Beidler of Trout Design Studio, seeks the Board's conceptual review of a roof addition and rear stair at this historic property in the Kalorama Triangle Historic District. The freestanding mansion was built in 1899 by real estate developer Arthur Coswill as one of several he built on spec in the 2000 block of Columbia Road. Coswill paired with leading architects for these projects, including Appleton Clark, Henry I. Cobb, and, at 2009 Columbia, William Conley. Interestingly, these high style houses were very elaborate and quite large for the speculative market.

The first occupant was a secretary of the British Embassy, setting the tone for the settlement of Kalorama by diplomatic residents. It was later occupied by the Greek Legation, the Italian World War Veterans Association, and, most recently, an art gallery.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, the interior, which was undoubtedly as grand as the exterior, has been entirely reworked and all finishes removed.

### **Proposal**

The purchaser seeks to convert the building into seven condominium units and add a roof addition. The addition would be centered on the roof, set in approximately six feet on each side. In depth, it would extend to the rear face, but is set back over twenty feet from the façade. At its maximum, the addition stands about ten feet tall, with a slight slope toward the rear. The cladding is slate, punctuated by casement windows. Roof decks and a stair tower occupy the remainder of the roof on the sides and in front of the addition.

On the façade, the only change proposed is to convert a window to a door to access the third floor porch. The applicant also seeks to create a new leadwalk from the sidewalk along the side of the building, as well as converting windows to doors and adding additional windows for the basement level units, one of which is designed to be ADA-compliant.

The rear stair is an unenclosed metal structure rising from the ground floor to the roof with balconies on each floor.

### **Evaluation**

Because this building is a free-standing, individually designed home, care must be given to retaining its character, which is certainly distinct from the more typical rowhouses of the neighborhood. In addition, the rear of the house is fully visible from Wyoming and Connecticut Avenues.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Hansen. *Kalorama Triangle: History of a Capital Neighborhood*.

In 2010, the Board reviewed a roof addition on the adjacent property at 2007 Columbia Road, also designed as a freestanding residence. After it was redesigned to be set back from the edges of the roof, the Board found the proposal for a new fourth story and deck to be compatible with the character of the property with the provision that it not be visible from Columbia Road. The rear was carefully reviewed due to its visibility over a parking lot.

Although it is believed that the proposal at 2009 Columbia would not be visible from Columbia, a flag test will help determine the exact placement of the addition so that it is not visible. In other aspects - scale, massing, and materials, the addition is respectful of the original building and compatible in its architectural detailing. The internal stair access is along the party wall, but the gap between this building and the property to the south is so narrow that its visibility will be minimal.

Changes to window and door openings at the basement level and first and second floors are sufficiently pushed back from the front elevation where they do not detract from the character of the house. On the third floor facade, a window opening onto the covered porch will be converted to doors, but will maintain the present appearance from the street. Should a railing be necessary to meet code, all details will be reviewed to ensure the maintenance of the house's historic character.

Generally, cutting into a berm to create a new leadwalk is not an appropriate alteration as it can compete with the primary entrance and result in an incompatible amount of paving in the front yard. However, in this instance, the width of the property itself and the distance of the proposed secondary walk from the primary would not result in them competing with each other or result in significant diminution of green space. As well, it is not entirely unprecedented for large detached houses such as this to have a secondary service entrance. The new walkway should be kept as narrow as possible and the retaining walls should be designed to blend with the landscape to the extent possible in order to minimize the intrusion on the streetscape.

The one area the staff would request further study is the design of the rear fire stair, with its modern and somewhat bulky appearance. Because the rear is fully visible from both Connecticut and Wyoming across different parking lots, care must be given to the design of the stair. The HPO has recommended, and the architect has agreed, that at the roof level and possibly the third floor level (where it is most visible), the stair will be enclosed and designed to complement the rear and the new roof addition to help blend its visibility with the vocabulary of the new addition.

## **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and that final approval be delegated to staff, with the following stipulations:*

- *Enclose the top level or two of the exterior stair to reduce the conspicuousness of this modern intrusion;*
- *Conduct a flag test with HPO staff prior to application for a building permit to ensure that the alterations will not be visible from Columbia Road; and*
- *Submit written approval of the project from the Capital Historic Trust, which holds an easement on the property.*